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Reagan warned of anti-Sandinista aid

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Iowa congressmen Jim Leach and Tom Harkin are among 37 House members who have sent a letter warning President Reagan that any secret CIA aid to anti-Sandinista guerillas operating in Nicaragua would violate U.S. law.

In the letter released Friday, the congressmen urged Reagan to "act in strict compliance with our domestic legal obligations" and the charters of the United Nations and the Organization of American States.

They said aid to anti-Sandinista guerillas might trigger a war between Nicaragua and neighboring Honduras.

Harkin was one of 36 Democrats to sign the letter while Leach was the only Republican.

A spokesman for Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., said there had been no response from the White House to the letter, dated March 24.

In the letter, the members cited news reports indicating the CIA had engaged in covert operations against Nicaragua, including support of anti-Sandinista forces based in Honduras.

"We believe that U.S.-supported anti-Nicaraguan forces may be involved in the current hostilities," the lawmakers said. "If this is the case, we believe this support is a violation of the Boland amendment to the Department of Defense appropriations bill adopted last December."

The letter said the amendment, which was sponsored by Chairman Edward Boland, D-Mass., of the House Intelligence Committee, prohibits the CIA or the Defense Department from aiding any group seeking to overthrow the Nicaraguan government or to provoke "a military exchange" between Honduras and Nicaragua.

"We believe that the current attacks inside Nicaragua are creating a climate in which open hostilities between Nicaragua and Honduras are a distinct possibility," the congressmen said.

"The climate of tensions and escalating military activity inside Nicaragua raises, we believe, the threat of direct conflict between Nicaragua and Honduras," the members said.

Boland, who was in China with a congressional delegation headed by House Speaker Thomas O'Neill, D-Mass., was not among the signers.

In addition to Miller and Harkin, the 34 Democrats who signed the letter included Reps. William Clay of Missouri; George Crockett Jr., Sander Levin and Dale Kildee of Michigan; and Edward Feighan, John Seiberling and Dennis Eckart of Ohio.

Also Bruce Morrison of Connecticut; Parren Mitchell of Maryland; Martin Sabo, James Oberstar and Bruce Vento of Minnesota; Jim Slattery of Kansas; William Gray of Pennsylvania; Sam Gejdenson and William Ratchford of Connecticut; Tom Downey, Richard Ottinger, Charles Schumer, Robert Mrazek and Ted Weiss of New York;

Also, Barney Frank, Jim Shannon, Gerry Studds and Ed Markey of Massachusetts; Pete Stark, Julian Dixon, Anthony Beilenson, Leon Panetta and Ronald Dellums of California; Pat Williams of Montana; Barbara Mikulski and Michael Barnes of Maryland; and Norman Dicks of Washington.